THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

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RAYMOND HUSE

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LETTERS ON THE ATONEMENT
THE SOUL OF A CHILD
THEOLOGY OF A MODERN METHODIST

The Christian Life

How to Begin. How to Keep On.
How to Be Useful. How to Be Happy.

By RAYMOND HUSE

THE METHODIST BOOK CONCERN
NEW YORK CINCINNATI

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GRATEFULLY DEDICATED TO MY FRIEND
ABBIE L. HAYES
AT WHOSE QUIET HOME THESE PAGES
WERE WRITTEN

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	FOREWORD	9
I.	CONVERSION—OUR PART "TURNING"	11
II.	CONVERSION—OUR PART "FOLLOWING"	18
III.	CONVERSION—GOD'S PART "INNER PEACE"	24
IV.	CONVERSION—GOD'S PART "INNER POWER"	29
V.	CONVERSION—GOD'S PART "THE INNER PRESENCE"	36
VI.	SPIRITUAL HELP—THE BIBLE	41
VII.	SPIRITUAL HELP—PRAYER	47
VIII.	SPIRITUAL HELP—THE CHURCH	53
IX.	CHRISTIAN SERVICE—OUR LIVES	59
X.	CHRISTIAN SERVICE—OUR MONEY	65
XI.	THE CHRISTIAN VISION—THE VICTORIOUS LIFE	70
XII.	THE CHRISTIAN VISION—"THE ALABASTER CITY"	74
XIII.	THE JOYOUS LIFE	81
XIV.	THE CHRISTIAN'S HOME IN GLORY	88

FOREWORD

The author of this book has rendered a real service to the church. Those who read its pages will be grateful to him for his careful and painstaking study. The pastor will appreciate the treatise because of the clear and positive way in which the essentials of our faith are set forth. The layman will not need to live near to his unabridged dictionary to keep himself from being lost in theological terminology. The young convert will be led by easy and delightful processes to appreciate the value and to appropriate the helpfulness of the institutions of Christianity for the development and expression of his religious life. The personal worker will find here fresh and convincing illustrations of the greatness, the simplicity and naturalness of the Christian faith, and will be better prepared to win his fellow man to Christ and the church.

We bespeak for the book a very wide circulation. We can think of no better way to strengthen the faith of the young Chris-

tian than by placing this book in his hands when he unites with the church and requesting him to carefully and prayerfully peruse its pages.

May the blessing of God attend it as it goes forth on its high and holy purpose as a good minister of Jesus Christ.

GEORGE B. DEAN, Superintendent Department of Evangelism, Board of Home Missions and Church Extension, Methodist Episcopal Church.

CHAPTER I

CONVERSION—OUR PART "TURNING"

Folks are like apple trees, and the production of character, sweet and wholesome in spirit and juicy with genuine joy, is like raising fruit.

My friend, who has an apple orchard, finds that there are two distinct elements that contribute to the bounteous crop. In the first place, there is the work of his own hands. He has to plant and graft and prune and spray. It is what he does—my hard-working fruit man—that makes the difference between the bitter fruit of some gnarled old wild apple tree and his lovely fruitful orchard.

Then, there is what God does directly. The sap that climbs up in the trunk and trickles out into the branches, the mysterious invisible life principle that makes bud and blossom and fruit—there is no human concern that can produce that.

Of course what we might call the human element is also divine in its origin. The skill of head and hand which enables the workman among the fruit trees to do his work is given by the same Princely Provider, who makes the branches blossom and fruit. However, because the exercise and development of it is intrusted to us, we call it the human element.

"Our wills are ours, we know not how;
Our wills are ours, to make them thine."

Of course, if a man would raise fruit, it is primarily important that he be thoroughly skilled in the part he must do—the human element. However, a knowledge of what we call nature is also desirable. The "reaction" of nature helps a man to know whether he is doing his part wisely and well.

There is a human side to conversion that corresponds to the planting and the grafting, the pruning and the spraying. The purpose of these opening chapters is to treat of this side, of "Our Part." It will be readily seen that, practically speaking, this is the more important part; and yet, as in the case of the fruit trees, it is well for us to

know about God's part also. The "reaction" of the Spirit of God on our lives will show us whether we are doing our part wisely and well.

Of the first disciples, whose beautiful decision is described in the Gospel of John, we might say that they turned and followed Jesus. The record does not use these very words, but they well describe what took place. There can be no better description or definition of the human side of conversion. It is turning and following Jesus.

It is "turning." The moral message of the Old Testament prophets is well summarized in the pathetic appeal, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" The Greek word translated "conversion" in the New Testament is often rendered "turning" in some of the modern versions.

Conversion means that if you are on the wrong road in life, you turn around and go back to the guideboard and take the right one.

When I was studying elocution the instructor told us that we ought to breathe deeply from the bottom of our lungs, not taking little shiftless gasps from their overworked top. When we asked him how to

do it, he said, "Breathing is largely controlled by the will." We at once tried it out and were really surprised to see how even this simple physical habit is controlled by human choice. This is even more true of our moral direction.

Our souls travel the way we choose to go. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

A beautiful young girl came to my study one day and asked, "What must I give up to be a Christian? I have been trained by a good mother from my childhood to live a pure life and have tried to follow her teaching. What must I give up to be a Christian?" I was new in Christian work at that time, but there came to me a helpful flash of inspiration, and I said, "Edna, sometimes we have to give up our own way." Her eyes fell and she said, "I understand." The teaching of Jesus plows much more deeply than the mere externals of conduct. "Turning" means more than the resolution to be conventionally moral and decent. Sam Jones says it means "quit your meanness."

One infinitely greater said, "If any man will come after me, let him *deny himself.*"[1]

It cannot be too strongly stated that it is well to turn and take the right road before you have gone very far on the wrong road!

Sometimes, in our attempt to magnify the miracle of conversion we have not emphasized the importance of this truth. When I attended prayer meeting as a lad, from the testimony of the "saints" I got the idea that it was a great thing to be very bad before conversion. I almost thought that I had started the good way too soon and had better "backslide" and start over again later, that I might have a more glowing miracle-story to tell.

Gipsy Smith tells of attending a religious service in which eager and grateful people were speaking of the wonder of saving grace. One man had been saved from gambling, another from stealing, and another from drunkenness. There was much enthusiasm as each told his grateful story. Then the white-souled man, who had lived for Christ since the far-away days when the sainted Sankey visited the gypsy camp, arose and said: "God has done more for me

[1]Italics not in original.

than for any of you that have spoken. He saved me from ever becoming a gambler, a thief, or a drunkard. It is better to build a hedge at the top of the precipice than to have a hospital at its foot." Amen, gentle Gipsy!

A man who, as a result of sin, loses an arm or an eye, does not have these lost members restored to him at the mourner's bench. And the intellectual, moral and spiritual losses that result from sin are equally permanent. Therefore, young man, keep your record clean! I have said you had better turn back and take the right road before you have gone far on the wrong one. Let me amend that statement and say that it is better never to take a single step on the wrong road, eternally better.

Harriet Beecher Stowe tells of a minister who said to a splendid young man, "My boy, is it not about time you gave your heart to Christ?"

"I have done so," was the earnest reply. "I am glad, my boy," said the preacher. "When did you do it?"

And the young man replied, "*I have always done so.*"

This is the true Christian ideal. A single

step on the wrong road, a single hour in sin, is abnormal and contrary to God's plan for our lives. The statement of Jesus that the one who is forgiven most will love most manifestly refers not to the experience of sin but to the consciousness of sin. The heart that cares, that is sensitive to the touch of moral soil, is the heart that glows with gratitude and love to our Divine Deliverer.

My friend, whose eyes peruse these pages, wherever you are on the wrong road, the first step for you is to turn and seek the right road. The sooner you turn, the gladder you will be forever and forever.

CHAPTER II

CONVERSION—OUR PART "FOLLOWING"

That familiar and expressive advertisement "His Master's Voice" is full of spiritual meaning. You remember the picture—the intelligent little dog listening at the Victrola horn and recognizing his master's voice.

Every normal human being recognizes his Master's voice. We are potential sons of the Eternal God and are made so that we know when our Father speaks to us.

Those early disciples, who followed Jesus, did not follow him because they reasoned out that he must be the Son of God and, therefore, they should hear and heed him. That conviction came as a result of their following. They followed him because they recognized their Master's voice.

It is the same with us. The Christ still speaks and we recognize his voice. Dr. Richard W. Swain in his book *What and*

Where is God? tells how he first saw God. It was in his mother's face. He was in her lap in prayer meeting and he saw that she was troubled. Sensitive child that he was, it clouded all his sky. Then he saw her lips move in prayer and a look of calm and radiance spread over her countenance like sunlight over the somber hills. And the little laddie in her lap saw God! The early disciples saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We see the glory of Christ in human faces and human lives. Thank God for the unbroken succession of living epistles, read and known of all men.

Our Master's voice also comes to us in what we call the gospel—the good tidings—whether this gospel be written or spoken. As the doctrine of the person of Christ logically and chronologically follows a fellowship with Christ, so our doctrine of the Holy Scriptures follows our acquaintance with these Scriptures. We do not so much read the Bible because we believe it is God's Word, as we believe it is God's Word because we read it—and see the face of the Christ shining through its lattice work.

Ralph Waldo Emerson speaks of the human soul as the place where God comes to

call without ringing the bell. The Spirit of Christ speaks to our spirit directly and we recognize the Master's voice.

The Christ who came to the early disciples beside the Syrian sea, comes to us in these three distinct and beautiful ways. I think he comes in many more. He is always coming, and in events the meaning of which at first we cannot understand we hear soon the voice of Him who spoke of old to the restless waves of the midnight sea. But by these three definite ways he comes: first, by radiant Christian lives; second, by the gospel written and spoken; third, by his Spirit within.

Beginning the Christian life is doing what the early disciples did when they heard the Master's voice—turning and following. In the first chapter we considered the meaning of "turning." In this chapter let us think of "following." By the way, these two words and acts correspond to those fine old theological terms "repentance" and "faith," and we have here what Paul said was the heart of his message—"Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

For the early disciples to follow Jesus meant, first of all, for them to go *to school*

to Christ. The very words "Master," or "Teacher," and "disciple," or "scholar," imply this beautiful fact. And going to school to Christ meant hearing and heeding his matchless teachings. These teachings are still the wonder of the ages. All must admit that never man spake like this man. One of the best summaries of the teachings of Christ I read one day in the *Christian Register.* I am sorry I am unable to recall the author, and I am sure I have slightly changed its words, but not its essential meaning.

> "God is Our Father,
> Man is our Brother,
> Life is a mission and not a career.
> Giving is living,
> Withholding is dying,
> We carry on yonder our work begun here."

In the second place, following Christ meant to the disciples following his example. Dr. Lucius H. Bugbee in his *Preparatory Lessons for Church Membership*[1] says that the unique distinction of Jesus Christ, as a religious teacher, is that he lived his own teachings. He might have added that this is the best proof of his deity.

[1] Methodist Book Concern.

To try to live like Jesus, to do what he would do, to say what he would say—that was the passion of the earliest disciples and may well be the ideal of the latest disciples.

Finally, to follow Christ meant to become his comrade! I heard of a successful business man who when asked to account for his achievements said, simply, "*I had a friend.*" Even in human friendship the real power of it is subtle, intangible, indescribable. We may speak of the advice our friend gives us, of the practical helpfulness he shows, but those invisible "cords of love" and "bands of a man" by which he holds our spirit to him and to truth—these cannot be weighed or measured.

Of course this is even more so with a Divine Friend. To those early disciples he was the vine, they were the branches; he was the bread of heaven, the water of life. And then, after the cross, with its dark and unfathomable mystery, and the wonder of Easter and Pentecost, by fellowship with him they entered into the spiritual meaning of it all; they learned what it meant to be "crucified with Christ," and to be "risen together with Christ," and to be filled with his Spirit. So, accepting him as their

Teacher, their Example, and their Friend, he became also their Saviour.

The centuries have come and gone since those humble fishermen left their dripping nets. Great spiritual truths and laws, however, do not change. Two and two were four when Adam counted apples in Eden. A straight line was the shortest distance between two points when the animals went into the ark. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God," is an eternal law. And our way of following Jesus is, after all, just as simple and just as plain as it was for Andrew and for John. He who came to them "veiled in flesh" comes to us by his Spirit. It is for us, like them, to follow him as Teacher, Example, Friend, and Saviour.

CHAPTER III

CONVERSION—GOD'S PART "INNER PEACE"

A WHOLESOME Christian woman one time remarked in prayer meeting, "When I was converted it seemed to me as if God and I had become good friends."

This inner conviction of divine reality and divine approval is the very foundation of righteous and cheerful living. To know in our souls that "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge," enables us to say spontaneously, "*Therefore will not we fear.*"[1]

This sense of inner peace is the first gift the good Father bestows upon us when, in response to our turning and following, he gives us that wonderful gift we call salvation.

There are three biographical incidents I like to place in parallel columns. The first is the story of those two unknown disciples

[1]Italics not in original.

overtaken by Christ on their walk to Emmaus on that first strange and wonderful Easter. Afterward, when they talked it over together, they said, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us by the way?" They were charter members of the *Comrades of the Burning Heart.*

The second incident is the story of the quest of good John Wesley for inner peace, for an inner sense of divine reality and divine approval. When, after years during which he discovered the hollowness of mere ecclesiastical rituals and even the emptiness of fussy philanthropy, he at last found the way to peace he said, "*I felt my heart strangely warmed.*"

The third incident is the story of the day when Phillips Brooks told Helen Keller about God. She said: "I know him, although I have never known his name before. I have felt his presence. *It is like the warmth.*"

This heart-warming carries with it for those of us who have sinned—and who has not?—the sense of forgiveness of sin, like the love of a mother for her naughty little child who is sorry, as she cuddles him and comforts him.

It carries with it also a sense of belonging

to the family of God, the spirit of adoption that gives us courage to "look up and laugh and love and lift."

The Spirit of God manifests himself to us differently in different generations and adapts himself to our varying human moods and methods. The average modern religious experience has less of crisis and more of gradual growth than did the typical experience of a generation or two ago. This does not mean that it has less of the divine. A sunrise is as divine as a flash of lightning. It probably comes about partly as a result of the fact that we recognize as spiritual and divine those forces and movements that we formerly called simply natural. This applies to the way by which this inner peace comes to seeking folks now. We used to insist that a man must stay on his knees until it came. Now we recognize that it may be a good thing for him to get up and go to work. At any rate, we perceive that in the average Christian life the peace of God is a *growing thing.*

In an old-time class meeting various Christians were giving their testimony. Some were much disturbed because they had lost their "witness." All had fallen into that

introspective mood which sometimes afflicts pious souls. Then an old Scotchman arose and said: "Brethren and sisters, I do not judge the condition of my health by feeling of my pulse or going to the looking-glass and looking at my tongue, I judge the condition of my health by *my appetite for my breakfast and my disposition to work.*"

A growing sense of relish for the good and the true and a growing eagerness to help Christ comfort and save a broken and needy world may be God's best witness to your heart that you are his child.

Indeed, Professor Caleb T. Winchester, who has made a careful study of the life of Wesley, finds that all his doubts did not vanish at the famous prayer meeting when he felt his heart strangely warmed. He notes the fact that in his diary a few days afterward the same old feverish questions reappear, and that not until he buried himself in evangelistic service and sought to tell others of the way to peace did the light shine steadily in his own sanctuary.

However, while we avoid a sickly introspection that looks for strange signs in the sky of your soul, instead of finding the glow

of spiritual health by food and exercise, we need also to remember:

> "Not the labor of my hands
> Can fulfill thy law's demands."

It is the doctrine of all religion, back to the dawn of human history, that God will reveal himself to the seers and the prophets. It is the unique doctrine of Christianity that God will reveal himself to all. "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." "Upon the servants and the handmaids . . . will I pour out my spirit." If we turn and follow Christ, if we pray to him and work with him, he will give us all the inner sunlight of his divine peace!

CHAPTER IV

CONVERSION—GOD'S PART "INNER POWER"

A CERTAIN religious weekly heads its "Wise and Otherwise" column with the significant statement, "Where origin is known credit is given." I wish I knew the origin of the story I am about to tell. Much more do I wish I could tell it in the words of the tender-hearted father who relates the incident. A friend of mine heard the story at camp meeting.

A preacher-father had punished his naughty little girl. And after the punishment they had knelt together, the big sinner and the little sinner, side by side before the throne of grace, and asked the forgiveness and help of the heavenly Father. As they arose from their knees the little lassie, with her lovely face still baptized with tears, asked her father this question, "*Oh, daddy, what makes me be so naughty, when I want to be so good?*"

The scientists, the philosophers, and the theologians have all tried to answer that question; and if there be one of my readers who has not been baffled by it in his attempts to live the white life, he is extremely fortunate.

We are apt to think that those old-fashioned preachers who took so gloomy a view of human nature, and who talked of "original sin" and "depravity," were pious pessimists, but, really, they were trying to answer this little girl's question, when they spoke of man as "of his own nature inclined to do evil and that continually." As A. J. Hough, the poet-preacher of Vermont, said:

> "Somewhere man had a fall,
> For there are several of him
> Living down upon our street,
> Who, with loving hands to help them,
> Haven't yet got on their feet."

This is not a book of science or theology, and I do not propose to even attempt to answer the little girl's question, but I simply remark that because the experience that inspired the question is a common human experience, the problem of living a good life is something more and something deeper than simply making up the mind to do so.

We must have the assistance of that mystic, invisible, but real something, beautifully called in the New Testament "the grace of God."

Mary Willard, the sister of Frances E. Willard, whose lovely life has been made immortal in the book, *Nineteen Beautiful Years*, one day wrote in her diary, "God commands me to love him with all my heart and I think I can do it *if I am helped.*"

That expression, "if I am helped," is the key to the great spiritual miracle of Christian experience. What we call the dispensation of the Holy Spirit is really Almighty God helping us to be good.

"He's the Mighty One of Israel
Who commanded and 'twas done.
In his hand is all the power,
Moving earth and star and sun;
And yet, just to make me patient
All his glorious might he will send.
For the strong one's my Beloved,
And the Mighty One's my Friend."

I cannot describe or define or analyze or explain the grace of God. It is just as mysterious as the "wind that bloweth where it listeth," as electricity, the wonder of modern science, and just as real a force in life.

Human personality is sometimes said to consist of the intellect, the emotions, and the will. The effect of the grace of God is seen on all these "parts of a man."

I know of a young barber who was converted in a little Pennsylvania church one night and immediately started out for the academy and college and is now a Christian minister. It is not that a man cannot be a Christian barber—there are many of them—but the shining of the grace of God upon his young mind awoke him intellectually and made him find his real place in life. It is not without significance that practically all our great colleges were founded as Christian colleges. The human intellect comes to its best by the mystic help of the grace of God.

Of course it is in our emotional life that the reaction of divine grace is most apparent and most immediate. Nor need this seem to be strange, for all our great human experiences upon which our homes and our nation are founded center in the heart. Love is the greatest thing in the world. No man can really live a good life unless the passion for goodness has captured his heart. And this is possible only when "the love of God

is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

One of the finest descriptions of what the grace of God does to the will was given by Frances Willard. She spoke of our wills being "fastened to the great driving wheel of God's will omnipotent by bolts of faith and bands of prayer." There is an old consecration hymn which pleads,

> "Breathe on me, oh breath of God,
> Until my heart is pure,
> Until with thee I will one will
> To do or to endure."

The coming of the grace of God into a human life is the great miracle of the gospel. It is the "birth from above," "the life more abundant," "the power of the Holy Spirit."

When a man has lived an unspiritual life and has shuttered his soul from the light of heaven and then "turned and followed" Christ, this grace divine often comes in with an unforgettable rush that marks the day as a red-letter day forever more.

On the other hand, especially if a man's education has been normal and has included Christian nurture as well as human culture, there may have been less of the lightning

flash and more of the sunrise, even as in the case of inner peace. Always the important thing is, not being able to remember a time when you are a stranger to the grace of God, but being sure of its miraculous help now as a child climbing a steep road is sure of the grasp of his father's hand.

In the little village near which I was spending my vacation a raging fire broke out in the barn, spread quickly to a neighboring house, and then threatened the whole settlement. House after house fed the hungry flames. Frantic calls for help went to neighboring towns and, a kind Providence favoring, assistance arrived in time and the village was saved. The interesting fact is that, like most New England towns, this village was located on the banks of a stream of water, whose abundance never fails. Yet only the timely aid from afar saved a hundred happy homes from destruction because there was no engine, no way of getting the water for use.

As near all our lives as the stream in the village is the unfailing grace of God. As desperate as the need of the homes that I saw that day, dark beneath the clouds of smoke and imminent danger, is the need in

our lives. Often, like the negligent village folks, we do not make the connection. The writer of the Epistle of James says: "Ye have not, because ye ask not," and then he says again, "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." It is his teaching, as it is the teaching of Jesus, that an eager, sincere, unselfish prayer brings immediate response from our Father in heaven.

CHAPTER V

CONVERSION—GOD'S PART "THE INNER PRESENCE"

Bishop James M. Thoburn was one time accosted with the question, "Surely you do not accept the theory that a Jewish teacher named Jesus, dead for nearly two thousand years, is alive to-day?" The good bishop replied smilingly, "*I know he is, for I have been talking with him this morning.*"

The student of Christian history cannot but be impressed with the fact that the outstanding characteristic of Christian biography is that the average Christian is beautifully aware of the real presence of Jesus Christ in his life. This fact is not confined to any group, any particular station in life, or any age. It is the universal fact of the Christian centuries.

It would be easy, if time and space permitted, to multiply examples from Christian literature and biography. The supply is limitless. We are surrounded with so great a cloud of witnesses.

On the one hand we find Samuel Hadley, of Water Street Mission, with his redeemed life radiant with the real presence of Christ, concerning whom he speaks in winning words to those who are as deep in sin as he has been. And they in turn become acquainted with the same divine comrade. On the other hand the peerless Phillips Brooks solemnly and gladly declared that the indwelling Christ was more real to him than the Christ of history.

A little Sunday-school girl just the other day told me in the simple, direct speech of unspoiled childhood that ever since she had gone to Sunday school and learned about Jesus she had felt his present helpfulness. And she is one of a million!

Many of us have glad prayer-meeting memories of happy-faced common folks singing

"His name yields the sweetest perfume,
And sweeter than music his voice,
His presence dispelleth my gloom
And bids all within me rejoice."

That it is not confined to prayer-meeting enthusiasts, however, is emphasized by the wonderful words of Whittier, the Quaker:

"We may not climb the heavenly steeps
To bring the Lord Christ down,
In vain we search the lowest deeps,
For him no depths can drown.
But warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is he,
And faith has still its Olivet
And love its Galilee."

That this experience is not the subjective creation of any evangelical creed but is a conscious fact of the Christian life is emphasized by the hymn written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to be used at the ordination of his brother to the Unitarian ministry:

"And evermore beside him in the way,
The Unseen Christ shall move,
That he may lean upon his arm and say,
'Dost thou, dear Lord, approve?'

"Beside him at the marriage feast shall be,
To make the scene more fair,
Beside him in the dark Gethsemane
Of pain and midnight prayer.

"O holy trust! O endless sense of rest!
Like the beloved John,
To lay his head upon the Saviour's breast,
And thus to journey on."

That ordinary folks, like you and me, may live in daily spiritual comradeship with Jesus

Christ, the Son of God, is the most thrilling fact of all life. The "Inner Presence" is the *summum bonum* of the Christian faith.

Its practical meaning is well illustrated in this story by Bishop Thoburn: A little boy was sitting with his mother in the railroad station and looking at the great station light, so different from the little lamps on the table at home. It was before the days of the universality of electrical illumination. The little lad was fascinated with the light. He said: "Mother, I would like some of that light to take home with me. I think I would like a whole hatful of that light to take home with me." "Now," says the apostolic bishop, speaking from his own glad heart, "the only way the little boy can have any of that light to take home with him is to take it all, lamp, wick, oil, and all." Would you have the blessing? Receive into your heart and life the Blesser. The apostle well declares, "He is our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption." And again, "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

It is by this fellowship with the divine Christ that we come to realize something of the meaning of the cross. It is here we meet it, not in theology, but in life. This Christ

who lives with us is the one who died for human sin on the tree. He has felt beat against his naked heart the awful storm caused by the conflict of human sin with divine holiness.

If we could live in spiritual fellowship with Abraham Lincoln, I think we would learn to love America and freedom and humanity with a new love. The reaction of the war on his noble heart would be shared by us. Even so—and more—by fellowship with the Christ, who died and rose again, we learn to die to sin and, "being risen with Christ," to set our affections on things above.

Reader, lonely and baffled by the storm of life, battling feverishly with sin and temptation, failing and falling, the good God did not mean that you should climb the steep, hard path alone. Will you not close this book a moment and pray, "Come to my heart, Lord Jesus; there is room in my heart for thee"?

CHAPTER VI

SPIRITUAL HELP—THE BIBLE

We have thus far been considering the beginnings of the Christian life. Let us now think of how to *keep on.* Saints' perseverance is not a donation but an achievement.

One of the greatest helps to spiritual life and growth is the regular reading of the Bible.

The Bible is the most badly abused book in the world. We treat it the way some churches in the country treat their ministers. The new minister comes to town to preach the gospel and build up the kingdom of God. He soon discovers that he must "run the church," attend to everything, from a leak in the parsonage roof to a Christmas sale for the raising of his own salary. At the end of the year the members of the official board wonder why his sermons lack point and preparation.

The purpose of the Bible is to teach us religion, to nourish our spiritual lives. We

try to make it a universal history, a manual of infallible science, and many other things.

Even when we read the Bible for our soul's profit, we are apt to lazily select a book or chapter at random, isolate it from its connection, and violate all laws of literary study in its consideration and its application.

The Bible is a collection of writings from many generations of men who lived close to God and by the inspiration of his Spirit received the message from God for the people of their time, or were able to see with clearness the hand of God in the events of contemporary history. These writings came to a natural climax in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the application of that gospel as given in the epistles. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath . . . spoken unto us by his Son."

The Bible should, therefore, be read with *discrimination.* We should remember that the chapter we are reading was not written primarily for us. Was it written before Christ came and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel? If so, of course, it was adapted to the people to

whom it first came. Let us find out all we can about those people, see what they had in common with us, and so find God's message in the chapter for our lives.

In the second place, the Bible should be read with *imagination.* Every once in awhile some dogmatic disciple affirms with much earnestness that he believes in taking the Bible literally. The "literal" meaning of "literally" is "by letter"; and our Great Teacher tells us that "the letter killeth." And he was speaking at that time to some disciples who were puzzled over the literal application of one of his teachings.

I heard of an old Scotchman who tried to interpret Shakespeare literally. He said, "Shakespeare said, 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.' Bobby Burns would have known better than that. He would know that a man would not wear his crown when he was lying down at night, but hang it on the bedpost."

When we insist that the Bible should not be taken literally but read with imagination, we are simply insisting that it is literature and not a cookbook, and that we should apply to it the same principles of interpretation that we apply to great literature.

Moreover, we need to remember that it is *Oriental* literature, and that the Oriental lived in the land of poetry and parable and understood naturally and easily the Syrian Christ, who said so often, "The kingdom of heaven is *like unto*."

The illustration of all this given by Professor Borden P. Bowne is timely. Take that passage, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust." Taken literally, we read of a God with wings and feathers. Read with imagination, in the light of the Spirit that giveth light, we become tenderly aware of the infinite brooding in the heart of Almighty God, and our hearts find peace and rest therein.

This does not mean that the Bible is a mere picturebook. We are given in its wondrous pages the message of God in real events, natural and supernatural, and in real lives, and especially in the real life of Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose again. But always the important thing is not the historical accuracy of an event but its spiritual significance for our souls now.

Finally, we need to remember that Jesus said, "Ye search the scriptures, because ye

think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me." The important thing about the Scriptures is that, like all the roads which led to Rome, they lead to Christ. If some Old Testament seer, in getting a message for his time —and so for all time—in the giving of that message, since he is human and a man of his age, mingles with his message ideas and ideals that are unworthy, that need not bother us. Let us, rather, look in the message for that about it which enables us, as it enabled him, to take one step toward Christ. And let us take that step with him. Eternal life comes not from the Scriptures but from Christ. Even the early Israelites drank not from the Law of Moses, but from that Rock which followed them, and "That rock was Christ." The value of the Scriptures is that they testify of him.

The great need of us all is not to criticize the Scriptures—think of criticizing Niagara! Not to defend the Scriptures—think of defending a sunset! Our need is to *read* the Scriptures, discriminatingly, with imagination and an eager quest for Christ.

"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." If we bring to our daily task a soul

that has climbed Sinai with Moses—that has seen the Good Shepherd with David, that has caught the solemn nobility of naked righteousness with Amos, that has learned to live and love with Paul, "A servant of Jesus Christ," our daily task is ennobled and we, ourselves, "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Bishop John H. Vincent was wont to remark that the Bible is a river from which a bird may drink and in which an elephant can swim. The crudest convert—and we are all in the kindergarten—may understand enough of the Bible to find in it daily food.

Read your daily chapter, then study into the wonderful deeps of divine revelation as long as you live on earth—and beyond.

CHAPTER VII

SPIRITUAL HELP—PRAYER

A FINE Christian gentleman, who is a member of the Episcopal Church, was elected president of the Young Men's Christian Association in a certain city. He politely questioned the propriety of the extemporaneous prayer with which the meetings of the directors opened. He was a lawyer, used to the formalities of court, and he said he would not think of coming into the presence of a king, a president, or a governor, to present a petition without a carefully prepared speech.

I do not believe this good churchman had quite caught the message of the New Testament about prayer. In response to the request of the disciples, "Teach us to pray," Jesus said, "When you pray, say, Our Father"—not King of kings, not Creator, and Judge, not even Almighty God, although all these he is, but "Our Father." I doubt if the children of Theodore Roosevelt ad-

dressed him as "Mr. President," or came into his presence with prepared speeches. The divine Christ said, "I have called you friends."

The spiritual approach in prayer, even in public prayer, but especially in private prayer, is like a child coming eagerly to his father, like a friend coming to his daily comrade.

Alfred Tennyson in "The Higher Pantheism" has some lines that give the philosophy, the purpose and the method of Christian prayer:

"Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and spirit with spirit can meet—
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet."

There are puzzling questions one may ask about prayer for material blessings. I believe these questions can be satisfactorily answered. There is no question, however, about the daily prayer for spiritual help as part of spiritual comradeship. It is the logical result, the inevitable conclusion of a conviction of the Inner Presence. If he is with us, of course we will speak to him, and "spirit with spirit" will meet.

Some find it helpful to have a *place* for prayer. Jesus spoke about entering into the closet and shutting the door. I knew a dear old class-leader who told me of an old apple tree that was his trysting place. The value of a particular place, however, is only that it may help us to regularity and concentration.

> "On land or sea, what matters where?
> Where Jesus is 'tis heaven there."

Many find it helpful to have a *definite time* for private prayer. John R. Mott, whose name is known around the world, says that next to the baptism with the Holy Spirit, he owes his spiritual success to the observance of the "Morning Watch"; that is, taking a little time in the early part of the day, "while the dew is still on the roses," for prayer and spiritual communion. A large number of earnest and efficient Christian workers could give a similar testimony. Get the habit in the early part of the day of turning your eyes to the eternal hills of God, and you will find strength and peace.

I was speaking in an Epworth League meeting about the Morning Watch and a woman arose and said something like this:

"How can my husband keep the Morning Watch? He gets up early, prepares hurriedly for his work, takes an early car and is away and at it before the most of you who are advocating the Morning Watch are out of bed." I got to thinking about that woman's husband! And I remembered that one day when I was miles away from home in a distant town and a little homesick withal, the ragman drove along the street. The badge of his profession was a row of cow bells across the rear of his wagon, that announced his approach. And anon in my mind I left that distant town and saw the pasture hills of my old home, with the nighthawks circling against the golden sky and the cows slowly winding their way homeward, and myself a barefoot boy driving them, and mother in the home waiting for me. My body still stood by the curb watching the ragman, my mind journeyed far across the acres and the years at the summons of the cow bell. So that woman's husband hanging by a strap in the car, his dinner pail in his hand, can come perhaps for one swift moment by his mind into the presence of the King of kings, his Father and his Friend, and get help and strength and joy.

So many busy people have to do much of their praying like that!

I remember that Jesus said once in a public prayer, "Father, I thank thee thou hast heard me. I knew that thou hearest me always; but because of the people which stand by I said it." This is a revelation of the spiritual habit of Jesus, of the constant silent communion with the Father like a hidden stream which glances out into the open sunlight for a moment, "because of the people which stand by." We should follow in his steps.

I think that also, like him, we should all of us sometimes pray publicly "for the sake of the people," and for our own sakes also. It is a helpful confession of spiritual dependence and shows others the trail to power and to peace.

As we continue to be "with Christ in the school of prayer" we find our petitions more and more taking the form of *intercession for others.*

Sometimes the question is asked why we should pray our Divine Father to help and bless others when we know he is already eager to do so if they will let him. Perhaps the best answer is the example of Christ

and his apostles, a concrete answer to an abstract question. Christ, who knew the mind of the Father, prayed earnestly for poor Peter, that his faith fail not, for his disciples and for those who should believe on God through their word. Paul in prison made out a prayer list of those of whom he made mention when he prayed.

The mood of prayer is so holy a mood that it must blossom into unselfish intercession. We do not know enough about the telepathy of souls, or about the spiritual forces let loose by the effectual fervent prayer, but we do know that such a prayer "availeth much."

It may be that, just as God's way of growing a garden is by the cooperation of a man with a hoe, so God's way of saving souls is by the cooperation of the man on his knees.

I do not need to urge you to pray for others. If you pray at all, really pray, really commune with the Christ, he will share with you his holy passion, and you will find yourself saying naturally,

"Help me to live from day to day
In such a self-forgetful way
That even when I kneel to pray
My prayer shall be for others."

CHAPTER VIII

SPIRITUAL HELP—THE CHURCH

Evangelist Wm. A. Sunday was one time asked the question, "Can't I be a Christian and not join the church?" He replied, "Certainly. You do not have to get on a boat to go to Europe—the swimming is good."

The church is one of God's most effective helps for Christian living. It is true that there are many good Christians who are not members of the church. It is also true that some members of the church are not good Christians. Nevertheless, the sensible course of procedure for any normal Christian is to connect himself with the organization that exists for the promotion of Christianity, assume his share of the responsibility, and receive his share of the benefits.

We hear much said about religion's being an individual affair, a private matter between the human soul and the Infinite Oversoul and divorced from all organized institutions. It is quite a popular performance in current

literature to eulogize religion, say complimentary things about Jesus and criticize the church.

It is true that a man's religious life is his own personal attainment. No institution can grind out Christians like Ford cars. It is also true that intellectual culture is a personal attainment. It is surprising sometimes how an individual can be exposed to the finest institutions for the promotion of culture and still remain personally immune. Nevertheless, intellectual culture—indeed, civilization itself—is a result of a human movement, a social organization. The people who are isolated from this movement, like some of our own mountaineers, are backward intellectually and strangers to the message of their own mountain.

It is even so with the making of Christians. The organized church brings us Christianity. It is an historical fact that the church gave us the Bible, and it is a present-day fact that the church gives us by preaching and teaching the finest interpretation of the Bible.

George Eliot says that much of the message of our conscience is determined by what good people think of us. Religious and

moral life is a social affair. We learn how to be good, we learn about Christ by living in organized fellowship with others who are trying to be good and who also know the love of Christ. Regarding that love the great apostle prays that we may comprehend it "*with all the saints.*"

The sacraments are both symbols of grace and a means of grace. Just so the flag is a symbol of patriotism and a promoter of patriotism. Our children who are taught to salute it at the same time pledge allegiance to the republic for which it stands. When one is baptized that baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace, but that inward grace may be greatly enriched by the loyalty, the consecration, and the faith expressed in the act of baptism, and thus the prayer of the ritual may be answered, that those "being baptized with water, may also be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

The same principle applies to holy communion. Zwingli and Calvin were both right. One said the sacrament was simply a memorial service. The other said it was a means of spiritual communion. Of course, any service of memory of the life and passion of our Lord that is real opens our souls to

the incoming of the breath of the Spirit and so becomes a means of spiritual communion.

Some people have intellectual difficulties about joining the church. Their brains are bothered by the creed! What they need is imagination. The creeds are not mathematical propositions, but are an attempt by human language, some of it symbolical, to express the great spiritual facts of the Christian faith. Probably no two people interpret them the same. The very same words carry different meanings to different minds.

Take that phrase, "the resurrection of the body," in the Apostles' Creed. To one it is a declaration of faith in a literal restoration on that day, "Toward which the whole creation moves," of this body in which we now tabernacle. To another, it is a symbolical way of stating the immortality of all our human life through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Does it matter which as far as our practical life is concerned? Can we say that one is more honest or conscientious than the other in reciting the creed?

If a man is essentially and experimentally a Christian and has spiritual imagination, he will find he is able to interpret the great

creeds in terms of his own life and will not care much about changing them any more than he will about changing the words of "Sunset and Evening Star," because they are astronomically inaccurate.

This chapter may come to some one who is a sincere Christ follower but outside the church. One reason I would urge you to come in is to have a share in the task. In a war isolated shooting is far from being as effective as an organized military campaign. All good soldiers of Jesus Christ belong in the army of the Church of God. In working at a job the workman who becomes part of the gang, doing his share under the direction of the overseer, is the man whose work is effective. We are workers *together* with Christ in building the Alabaster City undimmed by human tears.

It may seem that I have wandered a little from my subject, which was to discuss how the church is our spiritual help, but the most vital way the church helps us spiritually is by giving us a share in its holy task. What our souls need is work—work for others, work with others, work for Christ, work with Christ. This the church gives us.

A little girl was talking with her grand-

father. She said, "Grandpa, are you a Methodist?"

"No," was his reply.

"Are you a Baptist?"

"No."

"Are you a Presbyterian?"

"No."

"But you are a Christian," his little questioner insisted.

"Yes, my dear, I hope I am."

She thought a few moments and said, "Grandpa, I 'vise you to get in somewhere."

And so I do you, my outside friends. There are more reasons why you should come into any one of the churches the little girl mentioned—and many others—than there are why you should stay out. You need the instruction, the fellowship, and the task.

CHAPTER IX

CHRISTIAN SERVICE—OUR LIVES

The old-time robbers we were accustomed to imitate in our boyhood games used to demand "*Your money or your life.*" The Christian call to consecration is to give to the service of Christ our lives and our money.

This might seem like a severe demand, and not in harmony with the infinite love of the All-Father, were it not for the fact that just such a consecration brings the greatest spiritual enrichment to our own lives. Jesus used the comparison of the grain of wheat, which unless it dies, "abideth alone," but when buried in the ground yields a golden harvest. Even so the consecration of life and money, denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following the unselfish Christ, brings to our lives the spiritual wealth and power God meant us to have.

I used to wish that Paul had said "lives" instead of "bodies" in his call to consecration in the Epistle to the Romans. He said, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the

mercies of God, that ye present your *bodies*[1] a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your spiritual service." It seemed to me as if to speak of the presentation of "lives" had a more dignified sound than "bodies," especially when you are talking of spiritual service. But my experience in the pastorate has taught me the rare wit of Paul. At prayer meeting, for instance, it takes "*bodies*" to fill empty chairs! I have had good people say to me: "I was sorry not to be at the service the other evening. I was there in spirit." Without questioning the accuracy of their glib statement, I affirm that what that religious service needed was the presence of their "bodies." The great need of the Christian Church is an *habeas corpus* consecration.

Frances Havergal, in her exquisite consecration hymn, beautifully shows how our various "members and parts" may all share the service and the glory of entire consecration. The human hand has such limited powers to do deeds of Christly service.

"Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of thy love."

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[1]Italics not in original.

Human feet may carry us on so many Christly errands.

> "Take my feet and let them be
> Swift and beautiful for thee."

Human speech! To this the gospel was first intrusted. Upon this still depends not only its public proclamation but its personal advertisement.

> "Take my lips and let them be
> Filled with messages from thee."

So may we present our bodies a living sacrifice, which is our spiritual service.

I saw once this expressive slogan—"Christ alone can save the world, but Christ cannot save the world alone." Perhaps this may not be true in the absolute sense—I do not know—but it is certainly true that just as in nature and in science, in the realm of human invention man is a worker together with God, so in bringing in his kingdom of righteousness and peace and in bringing to individuals eternal salvation, Christ is depending upon human cooperation. We must not—we will not—fail him. And I heard a voice saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I;

send me." Not only the New Testament church, but the Christian civilization of the centuries was born when Paul on his knees in the Damascus road called out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

I heard a Grand Army veteran one time say: "Sometimes people ask me if I ever killed anybody in the war. I do not know. I was simply there in the ranks and did my part." And to all of us the first call is to serve in the ranks, to keep going those organizations and institutions which leaven this world with the leaven of the gospel.

I hope this little book may come to some one out in the country who is helping to keep *painted white* some steeple among the hills, who is helping to carry on some little rural church, the music of whose calling bells breaks pleasantly on the quiet of the Sabbath morning. Wherever you are, if you are doing sacrificially and songfully your part to keep "going" the Sunday schools, the Missionary Society, those institutions and organizations that spread the gospel of Jesus through all of human life, like the Grand Army veteran, you are filling your place in the ranks.

The Rev. D. B. Holt, D.D., for many

years a district superintendent in Maine, once wisely remarked, "Our trouble in the church is not too much machinery but not enough operators." It ought to be said with emphasis that the greatest field of Christian service is the Christian home.

My mother, of precious memory, one time attended an evangelistic convention with me and was troubled. The speakers in their enthusiasm pointed out many daily opportunities for evangelistic effort, and my mother, a lovely member of the old-fashioned reserved and quiet generation, was troubled. She had done so little work of the sort outlined by the earnest speaker. To comfort her I said: "Motherchen, you have given a boy to the Christian ministry. Don't worry because you have not talked religion to the milkman." Let it be understood that I believe in talking about Christ tactfully and helpfully to the milkman, but infinitely greater is the evangelistic opportunity and achievement of consecrated motherhood.

The opportunity for Christian service, however, is bigger than the privilege of taking our place in the ranks of the regular Christian organizations. Some of the richest opportunities are totally independent of

organizations and institutions. I do not know the full theological significance of the incarnation, of the eternal Christ of glory coming down and being "pleased as man with man to dwell," but the practical significance is this: by the gospel of friendship God started out to win the world. He came down and got acquainted. This world, our country, our city, our neighborhood—all these are populated with *folks*, folks who are so made that they need the friendly hand, the friendly word, and the friendly heart! Very few of us are commissioned as prophets to call down woes on their sins! Most of us are set down among them with the gospel, the good news. If we can be friends to them in the name of the Great Friend, and so lead them to love him, we are doing the finest type of Christian service "in Christ's stead."

CHAPTER X

CHRISTIAN SERVICE—OUR MONEY

One of the most persistent and pernicious heresies is the idea that money is filthy lucre and poverty *per se* a means of grace. Jesus never said that it was impossible for rich men to enter into the kingdom of heaven. He said it was hard work for them to enter. Then he hastened to add that it was possible with God. Hard work and God! That is a good combination in preparing for college or for heaven.

The reason that money becomes filthy lucre is because it is handled by unclean hands. Clean money is never germy.

Money is the concrete expression of day's work—of sweat of body and brain, of patient study and tireless toil on the part of individuals, of accumulated skill of hand and mind by families and groups.

I do not pray for money. I see so many who have less than my little that I would be ashamed to do that. To all to whom it may

concern, however, I am frank to affirm that I would like some more.

I have never been pastor of a church that was not suffering for more money. The capacity of the average church to minister, to build up the kingdom of God, to save souls, could, humanly speaking, be doubled if it had more money. I acknowledge with eager gratitude that the big things that count in the work of God are the ones that money cannot buy, but I am profoundly convinced that the church needs desperately many things that money can buy. If this is true in the home field, it is still more tragically evident where lonely missionaries face the challenge of the frontier.

The Christian doctrine of money and its use is based not on the worthlessness of money but on its worth. Our discussion of the subject here has to do with its relation to the individual Christian life. It ought to be said in passing, however, that the Christian thinker must be eagerly interested in every effort to so organize society that there shall be the fairest distribution of money that is possible. Dives in purple and fine linen, with Lazarus at the gate in rags and sores, is not the Christian ideal.

Since I know the value of money and appreciate its worth as a disciple of the Master who taught the Golden Rule, I should be not only eager to have my share but should be equally eager to see that my brother has his share, even if I have to sacrifice therefor myself.

We have used much the word "stewards" in our discussion of the Christian man and his money. I suggest that our modern word "trustee" conveys the same scriptural meaning in modern language. The trustees of a school, for instance, realize that they are responsible to hold and spend the funds intrusted to them for the benefit of the school. The money that comes to us individually, in the order of Divine Providence, is given to our keeping and spending as *trustees*. We are to so use it as to make our own lives as fruitful and fine as possible and do our share in helping the world.

How to divide our income between these two responsibilities is one of the first practical problems we have to face as Christians and *trustees*.

Both Scripture and history suggest "tithing," the laying aside of one tenth of each dollar received for Christ and his

work, as a good starting-point for the average man.

In the old days when Israel went to school to God, and when so many of the things that happened aforetime happened for our sake, or, at least, were written down for our sake, the people were told to give one seventh of their days and one tenth of their increase to worship and to God.

It is interesting to notice how that plan fits harmoniously into modern human life. The calendar protects the Sabbath, and our modern monetary system, particularly in America, makes it easy to think in terms of the tenth. The prophets emphasized this demand for the tithe, and there is good evidence to think that it was commonly practiced in the early church.

The important thing, however, is that wherever it is practiced in the modern church the peculiar blessing of the Lord seems to go with it. It is a concrete recognition of our trusteeship. The churches that tithe and the individuals that tithe find a certain steadiness in the glow of their spiritual life, and even of their material development, that reminds one of the closing promise connected with the old prophetic challenge,

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, . . . and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

CHAPTER XI

THE CHRISTIAN VISION—THE VICTORIOUS LIFE

A YOUNG girl came home from school the day of examination. Her father asked her, "What success did you have?"

She replied, merrily, "*I think I got by.*"

Her father was a wise man and said, "Did you notice the Phi Beta Kappa key Doctor Tasker has on his watchchain?"

"Yes, daddy."

"Do you suppose he got that by just getting by?"

The daughter says that question was the beginning of a new era in her life as a student.

Of course the difficulty with Phi Beta Kappa keys is that, in the nature of the case, they have to be awarded according to standards that are to a certain degree arbitrary and artificial. That is probably why so many who possess them find they will not always fit the keyhole of the door to

success. If they could be awarded according to fidelity of intellectual effort, it would be better. But, of course, only God could award them in that case.

There are degrees of Christian attainment. There are Phi Beta Kappa Christians and some, alas! who seem content to simply "get by." The Phi Beta Kappa Christian has a key—a spiritual key which unlocks for him the storehouse of grace—riches and glory for every time of need. And God, who reads the heart, gives the key.

The term "victorious life" that has come into recent use is a happy one. It is rather better than the expression "Christian perfection," because the latter, unless carefully explained, seems to mean the end of growth. The "victorious life" means that at just the place on the long road where you are now you may, by the help of Christ, get victory over every temptation that would keep you from doing your best—from being your best.

A New England minister gives this leaf from his spiritual biography: He became perplexed in his Christian life and his soul was athirst for "the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." He rode out from the seminary to Mount Tabor, where Mother

FitzGerald was conducting a camp meeting. He told that godly woman his distress and his longing. At her suggestion he knelt down on the grass in the tent and repeated after her from his heart this prayer:

"I give all of me to Jesus.
I take all of Jesus to me."

And into his heart there came an abiding sense of power and of joy.

I think in some of our discussion of the Christian life in these days of feverish activity we are apt to dwell simply on the first phrase of that prayer. The "victorious life" depends not so much upon what we do for Christ as upon what we let him do for us, and in us, and through us.

There is one New Testament word that is beautifully expressive. It is that word "let." "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." The meaning is that God is eager to give us complete moral and spiritual victory, just where we are. He will not intrude himself upon us. He realizes that we must work out our own salvation and fight our own good fight of faith. He is much more sensible than some fussy

human parents who will not let their children live their own lives. But when we deliberately desire to be Christlike, and turn to him for help, as soon as we will let him he comes to our assistance with a glad rush.

The late Dr. Benjamin Adams, who was a shining pathfinder to the deeper Christian life, used to remark that we advance by a series of crises toward God. When we look at our lives frankly and see well our weak spots, and then, in the spirit of the eager seeker at Mount Tabor, settle it forever that we will *let* Christ give us the victory, we begin the "victorious life," and

> "Life has no need but Jesus fills it,
> Life has no storm but Jesus stills it."

CHAPTER XII

THE CHRISTIAN VISION—"THE ALABASTER CITY"

"Oh beautiful for patriot's dream
That sees beyond the years
Thine Alabaster Cities gleam
Undimmed by human tears."

THESE two chapters, the one before this and this one, should be read together. Bishop Francis J. McConnell tells of a man who said he never could understand the doctrine of entire sanctification very well, but made up his mind he would sanctify everything he could lay his hands on. Sainthood and service are meant to go together. The "victorious life," made possible for us by the grace of Christ, like our material or intellectual wealth, is not merely for personal enjoyment. God helps us to be good and glad in order that we may work with him in building a good, glad world, the "Alabaster Cities" "undimmed by human tears." Unless we go to work at this divine task and keep

at work at it, we will lose both our goodness and our gladness. The hermit cell and the monastery bear melancholy witness to this truth.

On the other hand, the more we work at it, the more the depth both of our goodness and our enjoyment increases while we work.

The human race has always had two golden dreams, the dream of a beautiful yesterday and the dream of a lovely to-morrow. It is the unique characteristic of Christianity that it sets us to work to bring in the glad to-morrow, *building the Alabaster City in sections.*

There are two distinct doctrines as to how the kingdom of God is to be set up on the earth. These are popularly known as the premillennial and the postmillennial. According to the former, it is to be brought about by the personal advent of Jesus Christ in glory and power. He comes before the golden age, early in the morning of it. Indeed, his coming makes the morning.

According to the latter, the silent real work of the Spirit of Christ in the heart of humanity—his Real Presence—here and now will eventually bring in his kingdom of

righteousness and peace. His coming in personal glory will be to look over and reward the good work we have done in helping the Good Spirit make a good world.

There need be no conflict as far as practical work is concerned between these two views. If he comes, soon or late, "in the clouds" to set up his kingdom, at least he has not arrived yet! And he certainly would want us to do the best we can to get as many things ready for his coming as possible. If we are premillennialists, our song should be the plantation song of the old Negro cotton picker:

> "There's a King and Captain high,
> And he dwells beyond the sky,
> And he'll find me picking cotton
> When he comes."

There are several stanzas, the last of which ends with exquisite words:

> "And I'll kneel among the cotton
> When he comes."

The statement that Whittier places in the mouth of Abraham Davenport, when the famous dark day of 1780 settled down over the Connecticut Legislature, is always timely:

"This well may be
The Day of Judgment which the world awaits;
But be it so or not, I only know
My present duty, and my Lord's command,
To occupy till he come. So at the post
Where he hath set me in his providence,
I choose, for one, to meet him face to face—
No faithless servant frightened from my task,
But ready when the Lord of harvest calls;
And, therefore, with all reverence, I would say,
Let God do his work; we will see to ours."

On the other hand, if we are postmillennialists, we need also to diligently devote ourselves to our task. We can never *drift* into the golden age nor *stumble* upon a millennium. Whatever our theory about the future, we are called now to be workers together with God in building the walls of the Alabaster City opposite where we live.

Allowing that the supreme emphasis of the gospel is upon the power of divine grace and free human choice, nevertheless it takes no argument at all to prove that a man is more apt to live a Christian life if he lives in a Christian home. Therefore, let us multiply their number. And he is more apt to have a Christian home if he lives in a Christian community, a community whose social and industrial life is organized according to the

principles of the Golden Rule and permeated with the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And a Christian community needs for its environment a Christian nation! And a Christian nation needs a Christian world.

You see, then, how our task grows on us while we toil. We cannot deal with souls alone, because they are not alone. We must deal with life. There is room for all our varieties of gifts, graces, and usefulness. Who is there among us who has not the talent of making domestic life more wholesome, or amusements sweeter and cleaner, or business more in harmony with the music of human values?

Once upon a time in a little village Sunday school the committee tried a new scheme of decoration at a Children's Day concert. Instead of banking the platform with buttercups and daisies, they banked it with children. All the members of the elementary grades were given little chairs and placed up among the beams. I never saw lovelier decorations. They made me want to cry.

One little lassie came in late and sat down by me. She had been ill with some childish disease and had not been at the rehearsals.

I said to her, "Aren't you to sit with the others?"

She smiled bashfully and replied, "I haven't any piece."

I explained that all the little children were to sit there, but, like many older people, she could not grasp the new idea, and only shook her head and said, "Yes, I have no piece." Presently, as she watched all her playmates and friends sitting there on the platform, she felt the call of her kind. I think they arose to sing or did something that trumpeted to her soul. At any rate, she turned to me, her dignified pastor, and said, "By Jiminy, I am going up there," and trotted up with the crowd.

I wish I could make all my readers see the fine groups of young people all over the land who have signed up for Christian service. Some of them are to become ministers and missionaries. Some are to be teachers and nurses; some are to be directors of religious education and directors of recreation, and some are to be business and professional men, and some are to be wives and mothers. But they are to enter those callings where Providence seems to open to them the door, not for selfish gain nor in the listless mood

of mere drudgery. They have caught the vision of the golden age! They are building on the Alabaster City.

May I suggest to you a new sentence of consecration? It is this: "By Jiminy"—which being interpreted, means "with all my heart"—"I am going up there with them."

CHAPTER XIII

THE JOYOUS LIFE

I BELIEVE God wants us to be glad! Once in the old Epworth League days, when it was my privilege to lead a prayer meeting, the subject was "The Christian's Joy." I spoke eagerly in the exuberance of my young Christian life and victory, and when I had finished asked a Salvation Army soldier, who was present, to sing a rather rollicking gospel song about "Joy." Thereupon arose a very pious man and begged to differ with me. He said that we are not supposed to be happy here. This is the vale of tears. Here we have tribulations. The full joy comes after we enter the pearly gates. "It is true," he said, "that we have a peace in our hearts, and sometimes"—and here his face became radiant with a glow that belied his melancholy words—"we get a foretaste of the glory to come."

Of course what he said was just as true to him as my eager remarks were to me. You remember the old story of the two children

coming in from the garden. One exclaimed with tears, "*Oh, mother, the rosebushes all have thorns on them!*"

The other said with glad surprise, "*Why, mother, the thorn bushes all have roses on them!*" They both spoke the truth. So did the pious brother who rebuked the young man who led the meeting. Nevertheless, after twenty-five years more in this vale of tears, I still see the roses.

There are dark shadows that keep us from being perfectly happy. The problem of human suffering, for instance, is always with us. Why do good people suffer? Why does the good God let good people suffer? We do not claim that the gospel of Christ completely answers these questions. It does, however, shed a light on the way out of the valley that leads up to the shining lights, where we are sure that "some day we will understand."

We see even here the beginnings of the working of the law of compensation. To those pricked with the thorn in the flesh the Christ draws especially near, and says, "My grace is sufficient for thee." This law, the beginnings of which we see here like a section of a rainbow, operates mightily into eternal

years. It was regarding those who suffered terribly under the tyranny of Nero, the damned, that the revelator said as he saw the other side of the sky, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in the temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

I saw two little boys at play the other day. One of them hurt his fingers on the door of the automobile. He went crying to his mother, and she took him in her arms and cuddled him and loved him and comforted him and wiped away his tears. His little brother watched it all wistfully for a few moments and then he went out and hurt his finger too. Even so, it will be good when God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes.

I am sure that when we see the whole rain-

bow we shall be convinced that "All things work together for good to them that love God."

Another shadow is caused by *moral concern.* How can we be happy, how can God be glad when so many are sinning, are sowing to their flesh and reaping corruption? John Wesley said that holy grief does not quench holy joy. I cannot explain this from a philosophical standpoint, but I have seen it illustrated in life! Those who care most for their brothers in sin, who have the most moral concern, are those who have somehow found the secret of the deepest joy. The gladdest smile I ever saw was on the tender face of Hadley of Water Street Mission, who stood with a breaking heart out where the human wreckage drifted in on the tide.

As a matter of fact, the reason most of us are not living the joyous life is not because of these deep questionings concerning which we have been thinking; it is because of plain human restlessness and worry. Saint Augustine gave both the diagnosis and the cure when he said, "O Lord, thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in thee."

When we come to think of it we remember that most of our unhappiness is caused by annoyance over petty things. It is not the sorrow of the world but the lateness of the milkman that disturbs our day. A good deal of our misery is well stated by the oft-quoted remark: "I am an old man now and have had lots of trouble, but most of it never happened."

I do not affirm that the joy which is a natural result of fellowship with Christ is automatic. It requires careful cultivation. There is much truth in the reply of the old-fashioned Methodist who was asked, "Do you enjoy religion?" and answered, "I always do when I have it." But nevertheless it is possible for a child to be a member of a happy household and not appreciate nor appropriate spiritually his privileges. And it also seems possible for a person to be a regular member of God's family and not be as happy as God's children ought to be.

We all need to cultivate *the will to be glad.* The apostle Paul said under discouraging circumstances, "*I will rejoice.*" There was much philosophy in the words of an exasperated mother who took her children to the picnic. One little lad was inclined to be dis-

contented and fretful. Finally his mother said, "See here, John, I brought you here to have a good time, and now if you don't have a good time, you will get a spanking when you go home." After that Johnnie had a good time.

We have not sufficiently emphasized the duty of being glad. The mere pursuit of external happiness is, of course, a vain thing. Some one has well said that joy is a by-product at the factory of service.

Nevertheless, joy in the heart is the result of a definite purpose. Our sins are forgiven, there is moral help for us in Christ, we are surrounded with the mighty love of the Everlasting Father—we have every reason to be glad if we will. I say it reverently—God has put us here to have a good time. Not for that wholly, of course, but for that too. It is our duty to be glad.

I was riding with my friend in his auto the other day. We came to a beautiful road, baptized with the golden glory of autumn. He owned the car and could go there if he would. The road was free for all. He turned the steering wheel and we entered that road. It was all in the turning of the wheel.

"They looked unto Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed."

"If I have faltered more or less
In my great task of happiness;
If I have moved among my race
And shown no glorious morning face,
If beams from happy human eyes
Have moved me not; if morning skies,
Books and my food and summer rain
Knocked on my sullen heart in vain,
Lord, thy most pointed pleasure take
And stab my spirit broad awake."

(Robert Louis Stevenson. Used by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.)

CHAPTER XIV

THE CHRISTIAN'S HOME IN GLORY

As a natural reaction from the old evangelistic appeal, "Get ready to die," our modern religious emphasis deals largely with the need of faith in God for the life that now is. The adjective "eternal" as applied to life in Christ is a qualitative as well as a quantitative word. It refers not merely to the duration of life but perhaps even more to its depth and fullness. Just staying around forever would not be eternal life according to the New Testament.

Nevertheless, especially after the losses have come, and we approach the place that Lowell pathetically describes when he says,

> "As time goes on the road looks strange
> With faces new, and near the end
> The milestones into headstones change,
> 'Neath every stone a friend,"

we feel the need of a religious message that sees a light beyond the river.

Any doctor who should advertise to cure

our mortality, even with flimsy evidence for his claim, would have his office crowded with patients. This would seem to indicate that there are still many people who through the fear of death are all their lifetime subject to bondage.

It is not my purpose here to enumerate the intimations and evidences of immortality which are numerous in nature and life. It is refreshing to find so many voices in current literature recognizing the fact that

> "Something draws me upward there
> As morning draws the lark.
> It is as though my home were there
> To which my heart keeps turning—
> A home unseen but might be proved
> By this mysterious yearning."

Nor would I treat lightly the hope of some modern scientists to demonstrate future existence. We should welcome truth from every quarter.

The Christian, however, has a deeper certainty in addition to all this. I had preached the gospel for twenty years, giving its message in homes of sorrow and by open graves. Then for the first time a great loss came to my own home. I had to face myself the experiences I had seen others meet so bravely,

and I found that all the words of comfort I had gleaned from God's Word and spoken to others came to me with great beauty and comfort and power. The anchor held.

The certainty of the Christian is not the certainty of science or of logic, although in the highest sense it is both scientific and logical. It is as if a good, true friend, of whose trustworthiness and intelligence there is no question, both having been proved in experience in life, were telling you something he knows. The words of comfort written in the Bible in my own hour of sorrow—and multitudes have had a similar experience—became as it were illuminated in my soul by the "earnest of the Spirit." I heard no voice, yet I could *feel* the Christ saying to me, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions."

The Christian certainty is well stated by Paul, "We *know* that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

And the foundation of our knowledge is the inner consciousness of a great fellowship—a sureness that:

"This I do find,
We too are so joined
He will not stay in glory
And leave me behind."

There is a correction of translation in the revised version of the fourteenth chapter of John that is significant. According to the King James Version, Jesus said, "Whither I go, ye know, and the way ye know." What he really said—as the revision makes clear—is, "Whither I go, *ye know the way.*"[1] The "whither" is just what we do not know. The geography of heaven is not given us, but white and clear, right by the house where we live, is the Way.

Then you remember Thomas asked a question, a question that has been on your lips as you have read these words: "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?"

Jesus replied to Thomas—and to us—"I am the *Way.*" "You don't need a map, when you have a guide. Here I am with you now and with you forever after a little while, pulsating with life and power, seeing clearly the eternal years. Give me your

[1]Italics not in original.

hand and your heart and *let us go home together.*"

The finest certainty, then, is not found by feverishly looking for signs, nor by waiting for the slow discoveries of science, whatever they may bring, but by entering into spiritual comradeship with the eternal Christ.

Reader, the purpose of this little book is to help you to know Him whom to know fully is life eternal. Before you close its covers and lay it aside will you pause a moment and pray that into your life and mine, and into the lives of all who read it, there may come from a clear vision of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ a new radiance and power to meet life with a song and "To greet the unseen with a cheer"? Good night. I will see you in the morning.

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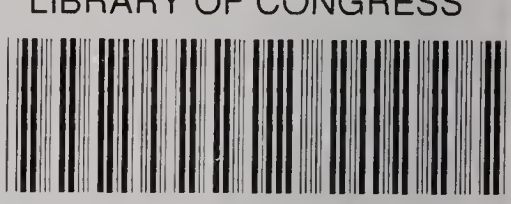

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